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ABSTRACT

Diverse opinions are held by workers, union officials, and labor researchers about the importance of the quality of working life to workers. Major issues in this debate focus on the following questions: (1) Is there a workers' movement to improve the quality of working life? (2) Do workers seek meaning and self-fulfillment in their jobs? (3) Can work be redesigned and humanized without affecting profits and efficiency? (4) To what extent are employees alienated or dissatisfied? (5) How reliable are the findings of studies on these issues? and (6) Why are experiments in job enrichment and restructuring considered successful in Europe, but not in the United States? The quality of working life is influenced by such factors as the application of technology to the work, economic structure of an industry, division of labor, private ownership and management, and society's emphasis on material success. Proposals for improving working conditions range from the utopian solutions of left-wing critics and sociologists which require vast changes in technology and social structure to the practical methods of union leaders which focus on the work environment, safety and health standards, and grievance procedures. While some experts contend job enrichment will not ultimately work, others feel it has already proven itself; both conclusions are premature as more time is needed before passing judgment. (ELG)

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THE ISSUES IN THE DEBATE

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QUALITY OF WORK LIFE was a lecture given by Al Nash to the seven sections of Labor Education Division's Long Term program on December 21, 1976. Professor Nash was introduced by Rolf A. Weil, President of Roosevelt University.

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This paper brings together the various advocates and viewpoints in the debate on Quality of Work Life. QWL has been a subject of much interest and experimentation in certain European countries, but in the United States because of the unconcern of the union movement the interest has been theoretical.

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QUALITY OF WORK LIFE

THERE IS A STORY, PERHAPS APOCRYPHAL, about a visit to a factory made by John F. Kennedy when he was running for president. As he was campaigning among the workers, a gray-haired machinist asked him in a seemingly antagonistic tone whether he had ever worked in a factory. Kennedy answered somewhat apologetically, "No, I never did." The old worker grinned and shot back, "You ain't missed a damned thing!"

As a former auto assembly-line worker, I am tempted to repeat the words of the machinist except that I suspect he was only bantering. I am sure that as a skilled worker he was proud of his job and enjoyed the esteem associated with his kind of work. Indeed, the work a person does is a major determinant of how he or she thinks and behaves and the kind of respect he or she receives. We are not, as the saying goes, what we eat, but rather "we are what we do and how we do it," as one writer suggests. Thus, in large measure, the work one does determines one's destiny.

RISING EXPECTATIONS

Because of increased education, higher order needs, unionism, and, as Daniel Bell suggests, "a revolution in rising entitlements," more and more people are becoming aware of the fateful role work plays in their lives. In addition, management is placing new emphasis on work humanization to increase production, and is proselytizing for its views. As a consequence, workers are asking increasingly more sophisticated and complex questions about the quality of working life, such as: to what extent does an employee control his work and work environment, experience meaning and fulfillment in his work, feel part of his work society, and achieve a balance between these elements of work and other aspects of his life?

Proposals to improve the quality of working life are designed to give jobs broader scope and more autonomy, meaning, and responsibility to the worker. They include arrangements for greater interaction, more opportunities for workers to make use of their abilities, and necessary resources to support such changes. More specifically, this may include job rotation, self-pacing, job expansion, flexible hour schedules, and team work. These proposals or changes are called job redesign, job enrichment, work humanization or democratization of the workplace, and are often used interchangeably.

CONTROVERSY ABOUT THE QWL

Attempts to define the meaning of the expression "quality of working life" and to discuss proposals to improve the quality of working life expose the diversity of opinions and the complexity and controversy surrounding this matter. A debate ranges around such issues as: Is there a movement among workers, especially blue-collar workers, to improve the quality of their working life? Do workers seek meaning and self-fulfillment in their work? Can work be humanized or redesigned without interfering with profits and efficiency? To what degree are workers dissatisfied or alienated? Can democratic decision-making be introduced in the plant? Are the data and tools used to obtain information about these issues reliable?

These are only a few of the major questions on which the quality of working life debate touches, and as we move along I shall mention others including speculation about some of the influences on the quality of working life and some of the recommendations made to improve the lives of employees in the work place.

Thomas R. Brooks, writing in the *AFL-CIO American Federationist*, intimates that it was the lengthy strike in 1972 of GM workers at Lordstown, Ohio which precipitated an outbreak of interest in the quality of working life "in radical-chic academic and intellectual circles." Disagreeing with the belief — which he claims is held by them — that the strike was part of the ongoing rebellion of youth, he notes that "in fact it was another strike in the long struggle of auto workers to improve their lot."

STUDIES OF THE QWL

I think it is clear that many observers agree with Brooks and deny that there is anything new about how workers feel about their jobs. They are critical of those who maintain that many workers are dissatisfied with their jobs and point to studies which support their criticisms. For example, a survey by the University of Michigan Survey Research Center, made in 1973 reports that only 11 percent of the employees interviewed are dissatisfied. The same study discloses that 80 percent of manual workers and 75 percent of professionals and businessmen are satisfied with their work.

Another survey conducted by Johns Hopkins University researchers at a General Motors assembly plant in Baltimore reveals that of the nearly 900 employees, 95 percent said they were satisfied with their jobs and 71 percent indicated they did not find their work tiresome or boring. This is a surprising finding since most studies of auto assembly-line workers conclude that they are angry and self-estranged as a result of the monotony, fatigue, and restraints associated with their work. Still another survey made in 1973 by Thomas Sorenson finds that 91 percent of blue and white-collar workers enjoy their work. Sorenson notes that sur-

prisingly few individuals wanted their jobs made less boring or more interesting.

A number of commentators who have surveyed the field using the data gathered by Gallup and others question the arguments made by those who claim workers are dissatisfied with the quality of working life. George Strauss, an eminent voice in the quality of working life debate, notes that workers may be dissatisfied, but it is with "low income, inadequate fringe benefits or tyrannical supervision" rather than with a "lack of challenge" on the job. He believes that "people as a whole are willing to tolerate large doses of boredom if they are paid enough." Not surprisingly he concludes that there is no blue-collar revolt against work as it is now structured. Another commentator, Sar A. Levitan, director of the Center for Man, power Policy Studies at George Washington University, suggests that policy makers should concern themselves with developing new jobs for the unemployed instead of fretting about how workers feel about their jobs. Finally, former secretary of labor James D. Hodgson states that the amount of job discontentment has been exaggerated and is largely a creation of "pop sociologists and their media sisters under the skin."

VIEWS OF UNION LEADERS

On another level, William Winpisinger, general vice president of the International Association of Machinists and an effective spokesman for those union leaders who are skeptical of the charge that workers are alienated by their jobs, concedes that there is discontent among workers — indeed, he adds, it has always been so. Noting that "somewhere in the Bible it says 'Seek and ye shall find,'" he says that it is not astonishing that the authors of *Work in America* found "a bad case of 'blue collar' blues in America."

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Whatever the dissatisfaction of workers with their jobs, he argues, it will not be alleviated by job enrichment, rearranging hours, installing career ladders, or creating cohesive work groups. Mr. Winpisinger claims, as have other union leaders involved in the debate, that he has been directed by the rank and file to negotiate with management over a broad spectrum of matters, but never "have I," he says, "carried into negotiations a membership mandate to accept job enrichment as an answer to work satisfaction."

Winpisinger is especially critical of intellectuals — and I assume academics. His words are worth repeating in full:

The point is not what intellectuals seek from work; it is what unskilled and semiskilled factory workers seek. And as one who has been there, I can assure you that the vast majority of the people working in the nation's mines, mills and factories are not there in search of self-fulfillment. They are there because they need their pay check at the end of the week. One man's idea of boredom is another man's bread and butter.

Mr. Winpisinger and other prominent union leaders are also critical of management's motive and efforts in supporting job enrichment programs; they believe these efforts are designed to undermine unions or to avoid unionization. This belief is supported by the contention of Ted Mills, chairman of the National Commission on Productivity and Work, that 80 percent of 150 work enrichment experiments were conducted in order to avoid unionization. Many union leaders also believe that attempts to improve the quality of working life are gimmicks for increasing job productivity without giving the workers a fair share of the profits which may result. They also maintain that the correct approach to improving the quality of working life is and will remain the traditional one of obtaining higher wages, shorter hours, and better working conditions, along with early retirement,

good pensions, adequate health and welfare plans, and effective grievance procedures. Finally, the same union leaders affirm that the drive to improve the lot of workers on the job must be fueled by the workers and expressed through their unions.

IS WORK A CENTRAL LIFE INTEREST?

The assertion by some, that workers seek meaning, recognition, and self-fulfillment in work is, for a number of experts, simply not a realistic assessment of the typical worker. For instance, Robert Dubin's research suggests that work is not a "central-life interest" for most workers; rather, he and others find that workers are much more interested in leisure and consumer activities. Some sociologists conclude that workers, even when they are dissatisfied with their work, console themselves with the hope that the money earned on the job will enable them someday to buy a small business and escape from the factory or, at the least, that their accumulated seniority will permit them to be transferred to an easier job.

Some investigators believe that the unhappiness of some workers is not a result of their job but of some other aspect of life *outside* the workplace. Indeed, they maintain, for many, work may compensate for their unhappiness off the job. On the job, they say, workers have a sense of identification with the union or management, obtain satisfaction from contributing to a finished product, and enjoy belonging to a social group. Workers may get a sense of worth and dignity on the job which they rarely receive outside the workplace. These writers also question whether it is possible to demonstrate that the workplace is the source of the discontentment which workers may harbor.

SATISFACTION WITH THE JOB AS A WHOLE

There are still others, such as Robert Flauner, author of *Alienation and Freedom*, a comparative study of workers in auto, textile, printing and oil refinery industries, who contend that workers in many occupations may be unhappy with the particular work they do but are satisfied with the job as a whole. The workers may feel that the "job stinks but the pay is good." In addition, many extrinsic satisfactions may be derived from "working the system" (e.g., doubling up, banking work, working ahead of the job, and developing short cuts), socializing on the job (e.g., playing cards at lunch time and larking), emphasizing some salient aspect of the job as valuable (e.g., the ideology of hard work or the importance of the job to the total product), and, finally, dissenting with management, a right which is permitted by the collective bargaining agreement.

The relationship of the union to the extrinsic satisfactions felt by the worker needs further elaboration. Many academic observers in studying the quality of working life seem to have a blind spot when it comes to the role of the union: they simply ignore the union. However, Ivar Berg and others who are aware of the role of the union, assert that it increases the degree of social interaction among workers, thereby creating more cohesive groups and a warmer, more significant, and more purposeful relationship among workers on the job—and sometimes off the job. The union also greatly increases the power of workers to intervene in processes affecting them, and provides them with an awareness of common interests which can be discussed and acted on. The satisfactions resulting from the union's presence are real and provide a measure of meaning, hope, and excitement which enriches

the quality of working life for the typical union member in either the plant or the office.

DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING DATA

Ivce Berg also indicates that while there are data available on all kinds of economic aspects of work, little data exist about the quality of life experienced by workers on the job. He finds that few corporations keep accurate records of indicators which could serve to evaluate the quality of working life such as turnover, sabotage, absenteeism, hires, or latenesses. Consequently, he argues, the research is confined too often to anecdotal evidence, lacks objective information, and does not permit firm conclusions to be reached about the impact of work on workers. Janice Hedges does look at the available data on absences from work to observe if there is any relationship between absence and worker dissatisfaction. She concludes that the data are insufficient to explain high or low rates of unscheduled absences by workers.

Mitchell Fein, an industrial engineer, claims that when he carefully examined job enrichment projects and the studies made of them, he found major weaknesses in these projects or studies. To begin with, he says, researchers made serious errors in reporting the data, which as a result led to a biased and distorted interpretation of the experiments. Second, most of the experiments were conducted with "hand-picked employees" who were not at all representative of the working population of the various plants in which the experiments were carried out. Third, nearly all job enrichment experiments were performed in non-union plants. Fourth, even where the plant was unionized, neither the worker nor the union was consulted in the planning of job enrichment experiments. Finally, despite the many success stories reported

about job enrichment experiments, only a few actual cases have been published in the last 10 years. What Fein is therefore charging is that most claims about job enrichment projects are based on anecdotal reports, superficial evaluations, and stacked groups of workers.

Robert Brauner suggests that the scarcity of comparative studies of industries and occupations prevents any broad-based conclusions about how technology, bureaucratic structure, division of labor, and economics systematically affect the lives of workers. In addition, a team of investigators of which I was a member reviewed all available research published since 1965 which tried to relate job enrichment and other proposed changes in work to job productivity and job satisfaction. Our review concludes that "valid and pertinent studies are too few to permit definitive answers to most questions" about job enrichment projects. Still another commentator, Andrew Levison, concludes that at most there are only 3,000 workers in American industry today on jobs which were deliberately enriched.

The team in which I participated, and other investigators, are highly critical of the methods used to obtain data. They discovered that much of the literature devoted to the examinations of job enrichment experiments or projects fail to use control groups, are internally inconsistent and not replicable, and consist of measurements which are, at the best, dubious. Other reviews of the methodology of studies used to demonstrate dissatisfaction among workers conclude that the authors of these studies have imputed poor mental health or low self-esteem to the workers investigated because the logic of the workers' situation appeared to call for such psychological states. Too often their imputations are a projection, critics asserted, of the observers' prejudices or are the result of neglecting the ability of workers to surmount situations in

which aspects such as powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation or estrangement are present. Some writers appear to design studies which will demonstrate that workers are alienated by considering only the "objective" situation of the workers and rejecting as invalid — or even as evidence of alienation — the favorable comments workers make about their jobs.

IS WORK DEHUMANIZING?

Perhaps crucial to this discussion is the charge a number of concerned observers make that repetitive, monotonous, and mechanical work is dehumanizing. They point to the auto assembly-line workers who despite their high pay and other benefits remain among the angry workers of America. Yet investigators report that two thirds of auto assemblers questioned are satisfied with their jobs. It is not surprising, they argue, since job satisfaction questionnaires are superficial, offer no alternative models to the workers who answer questions about their job, and often do not test in depth for low self-esteem, estrangement or other indicators of alienation.

Marx is often cited to support the charge that work under the present social and economic arrangement turns workers into machines, stimulating "stupidity and Cretinism" among them. To get ahead of my analysis somewhat, permit me to note that these charges were answered by other critics who point out that Marx was describing work in the early 1840's, the beginning of the industrial revolution when factory work was truly wretched. Moreover, he saw alienation as descriptive of the fact that workers did not own the means of production, or control the conditions of their employment, the raw material or the finished product. Marx, these critics say, believed workers would become discontented with these conditions and ultimately rebel by joining with each

other to change them. They assert that nowhere did Marx imply that workers would become robots, dehumanized, or blindly obedient. Alienation may exist in the eye of the beholder rather than among workers, say the critics of those who perceive workers as alienated and dehumanized by their work.

SUMMARY OF VIEWS OF CRITICS

Before presenting the views of the proponents of work humanization through job redesign and other changes, I think it would be useful to summarize the views of its critics. They deny that there is any significant movement among workers for job enrichment or that there is any great dissatisfaction among them with their jobs. There is little evidence, they maintain, of workers who are alienated by their jobs — even if they are discontented with their lot in life. Many union leaders are skeptical of the job enrichment program and other proposals for bettering the quality of working life. They suspect that the objective of these proposals is to undermine unions. In the academic community also, there is skepticism about the validity of the available data and the methods used to bolster the claims of adherents of job redesign that enriching jobs results in interesting work. Still others suggest that it may be more useful to look for causes of dissatisfaction outside the work place, perhaps in the market place or in such areas as family, sex, love, religion, ethnic group, education, or the ghetto. Some writers indicate that the social and economic rewards of work (e.g., good pay, social life on the job, or satisfaction in making a useful contribution to the job) may compensate for disappointment with life *off* the job. Finally, some opponents of job redesign or work humanization argue that workers who are dissatisfied, for example, with boring or closely supervised work, frequently quit and become truck drivers or take jobs in retail

stores or gas stations. Those who remain may have personalities that are congruent with the work they perform and, consequently, their work is not a source of dissatisfaction for them.

SUPPORTERS OF WORK HUMANIZATION

I would like now to consider the position of those who support measures associated with work humanization or job redesign; that is, those who argue that workers desire recognition, meaning, self-expression, and satisfaction in work. The study, *Work in America*, a government-supported study published in 1973, concludes that large numbers of workers find their jobs devoid of meaning, dignity, and prestige. It reported "turnover rates as high as 30% annually and a 40% increase in white-collar union membership between 1958 and 1968" as illustrations of discontentment among workers. Evidence was found also that satisfying work is a basic human need and that work-related problems have contributed to an increase in the instability of family and community relations as well as to an increase in alcohol addiction, drug abuse, and delinquent behavior.

Work in America was greeted by many as one of the most important documents of the year, and along with the Lordstown strike stimulated renewed interest in the quality of working life. This study was supported to some extent by another work issued the same year which focused on the auto industry. The writer, Robert Guest, who, with Charles Walker, had investigated an auto assembly plant in 1952, finds in his most recent study of the same plant that job dissatisfaction is as great there in 1973 as it was in 1952 and that auto work continues to remain as degrading and demeaning as ever.

Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb in *The Hidden Injuries of Class* indicate that work in present-day factories produces unequal-

ities and indignities which are aggravated by class differences. Others also support the claim that work is still demeaning, humbling and often eroding the self-respect and self-esteem of workers. Sennett and Cobb as well as other writers suggest that we cannot escape the shadow work casts over our lives. They can point to the use of alcohol on the job, the large number of quits, latenesses, absences, early retirements, the high degree of drug abuse, the frequency of sabotage, the refusal to work overtime, and the large number of grievances submitted by workers to illustrate their claims. Finally, they can point to a recent Harris poll of a cross section of Americans in which almost 80 percent of those interviewed indicates that the quality of life, including conditions of work, is highly important. The survey predicts that there will be mounting pressure on the government to improve the quality of life.

UNION LEADERS' VIEWS

Grist for the mill of those who perceive large numbers of workers as dissatisfied with their jobs is the comment of Walter Reuther that auto plants are "gold-plated sweatshops." Irving Bluestone, a UAW vice president in charge of the GM department, observes that most work places are islands of authoritarianism where workers are denied the right to make decisions about important aspects of their jobs. They are forced to conform to the demands of the machines and the assembly line which "dominate and direct" their work life. He also notes that company executives are provided with posh dining halls, reserved parking spaces, and other luxuries, while the facilities of workers are drab and limited.

Other unionists from, for example, the IUE, IAM, AFSCME, and state federations of labor have been interested in improving the character of work life through job enrichment and other job

changes. A report issued by the Ford Foundation which surveys a number of work humanization experiments acknowledges the support of local union leaders in Michigan, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and a number of other states.

Advocates of work humanization contend that the number of union leaders who believe that most workers are satisfied with their jobs is highly exaggerated. Evidence for their claim is found in one survey which collected answers from 69 leaders of a cross section of national and international unions. Of the union leaders surveyed, 85 percent believe "workers are better educated today and therefore demand more from their jobs"; 87 percent agree that "younger workers insisted more on participating in decision making than older workers"; 80 percent disagree with the statement that "the hue and cry about mounting job dissatisfaction is an invention of professors, journalists and the 'left'"; 74 percent agree that "workers who have experienced job enrichment almost invariably indicate greater satisfaction with their work"; 86 percent disagree with the claims that "workers don't care what they produce or how they produce — as long as they are well paid"; and only 45 percent agree with the observation that "most workers are satisfied with their work."

The same study compared members of top management with top union leaders in their response to a series of statements about the quality of working life. There were some areas in which both agreed. To illustrate, nearly 90 percent in both union and management groups agree that "improving the quality of work life is a desirable management goal even if it doesn't increase productivity"; that more than 70 percent in both categories agree that "unions are suspicious of job enrichment but they will support it once they are confident that it isn't a productivity gimmick"; and that 75 percent of the respondents in each group agree that

"workers who have experienced job enrichment almost invariably indicate greater satisfaction with their work." The authors of the study indicate that there is sufficient agreement among members of both union and management generally to develop a joint program for initiating projects in relating job enrichment to job productivity.

The evidence cited in the preceding study and references made to Bluestone and other union leaders indicate that they are divided in their evaluation of the claims made by those who believe workers are discontented with their jobs and desire changes in their job situations. It is also suggested by some union leaders that even if most workers are satisfied with their jobs, the minority who are dissatisfied cannot be ignored.

LIMITS OF UNIONS

Other writers go beyond asking how many union leaders believe workers are satisfied with their jobs. Both Bell and Blauner, for example, intimate that union leaders fail to challenge the present organization of work because they are blind to its harsh effects. Another author states that unions are limited in their ability to introduce industrial democracy to the workplace because they are not involved in decision making with respect to many important characteristics of work, including scope, pace, and variety of operations. In addition, Guest and Blauner and others claim that unions are "big and impersonal" and thereby contribute to the anonymity felt by workers.

Some sociologists maintain that union leaders and a number of academic observers also fail to perceive that the mode of working life associated with unskilled work frequently creates despair, deprivation, and social humiliation. Those who believe workers are alienated argue that there is a discrepancy between

what workers observe about their job situation or, at least, how they answer the questions of sociologists, and the objective situation of their jobs. They dismiss the findings of the University of Michigan and the Gallup poll that job satisfaction is widespread and account for these findings by noting the lack of class consciousness among workers and the failure of the workers involved to place much emphasis on values such as control, meaning, and self-fulfillment on the job. The lack of pressure by workers on union leaders for changes which would lead to more control and more autonomy on the job is cited by some observers as indirect evidence that workers are alienated. In general, this school of thought believes that the typical worker may be satisfied with his job, but at the same time alienated.

WORK SHAPES LEISURE

Those who believe workers are shaped by the kind of work they do notice a correlation between the type of job and leisure time activities. For example, Martin Weissner, who studied workers in three kinds of job situations, finds that those who have a fair degree of autonomy on the job spend their leisure time mainly on hobbies, home construction, and sports, and that they are active in organizations. He finds the workers whose jobs involve a great deal of interaction with others but little autonomy spend their leisure time mainly in social situations. He finds further that workers who have a passive role in the work they do and little autonomy or interaction with others spend their leisure time mainly in solitary activities such as fishing, listening to the radio, and looking at TV. In addition, this school of thought suggests that if you feel bored and powerless and receive little respect on the job, you will probably view the world of leisure through spectacles filtered by this experience.

EXPERIMENTS IN EUROPE

Some of those who see workers as alienated or dissatisfied with their jobs have instituted experiments and changes in job design to reduce their dissatisfactions. There are factories in Sweden and Holland, and elsewhere in Europe, where it is claimed status distinctions between white-collar and blue-collar workers are being abolished, where work is organized to produce cohesive work groups and more social interaction, and where provision is made for employee representation on the board of directors. In addition, foremen are reduced in number or eliminated so work groups can make their own arrangements with respect to pace, variety, scope, and other aspects of the job.

In Sweden, for example, a number of auto plants, including Volvo, have installed mini-lines instead of the long lines of American auto plants. Workers can build the whole engine. For example, Kim Hays, an American who worked three months at the Swedish Saab-Scania plant, tells about her experience working on a mini-line assembling motors. She says that a good worker could assemble a motor in 37 minutes or less. Each worker had a little wagon on which the unfinished motor was mounted. This wagon is pushed by hand around a U-shaped track and each worker picks up the parts as the wagon goes around. Each assembler works at his or her own pace. However, if the worker works too fast, he or she catches up with the worker in front; if the worker works too slow, the worker in back catches up. Consequently, a group of workers on a particular line have to maintain an even tempo in relation to each other so that they don't trip over each other. This leads to members of the group attempting to understand and get along with each other. Hays indicates that she felt pride, purpose, and a sense of belonging to a group. She enjoyed working there and reports that the women workers she

knew shared her sense of enjoyment on the job; "I don't think," she says, "a single one of them would have chosen to quit her job."

Irving Bluestone, commenting on innovations at Volvo, says that its management has broken the chains that "bond" the workers to the line. Seymour Kahn, also of the UAW and a visitor to Swedish auto plants, notes that, by law, workers in Sweden have the right to shut down unsafe jobs; that before a factory is built workers have a voice in the planning of those aspects which relate to their health and safety; and that, in general, safety and health facilities are significantly superior to those found in American plants.

Parenthetically, we should note that five of a team of six American auto workers, who worked four weeks in a modern Swedish auto plant as part of a program sponsored by the Ford Foundation, preferred the typical auto assembly line in the United States. One of the workers who was critical of production methods in the Swedish plant complained that the pace was too fast and that the work created too much tension. On the other hand, the worker who disagreed with the majority felt less driven and more satisfied than on her assembly-line job at the Cadillac plant in Detroit.

Tom Wicker, who writes regularly for *The New York Times*, reports the new approach of an IBM plant in Amsterdam, where the workers who produced typewriters on a conventional and long assembly line felt themselves to be "little more than robots." He indicates that a survey revealed that Dutch workers, especially younger workers with more education than their parents, desired "more responsible jobs, a more sociable working climate, a better relationship to management and the product — all taking precedence over higher wages and better career opportunities." As a result, the company developed nine "mini-lines" to replace the

conventional assembly lines. Each mini-line employs about 20 workers, and each line produces "a complete and recognizable product." Wicker claims that the changes resulted in a better quality product and reduced the time necessary to complete the typewriter. Absenteeism and turnover was reduced, and involvement in work increased as a consequence, he says, of the mini-line which "adapts the work to be done to the needs of the men and women who do it."

EXPERIMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States a number of experiments are being tried. One experiment at the Rushton Mining Company involves a steering committee composed of representatives of the mine operators and members of the United Mine Workers Union. This committee established two teams of nine men who were volunteers. Each worker was trained to do the work of any other person on the team and earned maximum pay. The foreman was put in charge of safety, and the production of coal and the resolution of grievances was left to the team. The result of the experiment was a cooperative team spirit and an intense interest, we are told, in the problems connected with work. The two teams have lowered production costs, increased production, and lowered the rate of turnover, safety violations, and absences.

The Ford Foundation and researchers it supports have examined experiments in job enrichment and restructure of work in a number of other unionized workplaces, including an auto mirror plant, auto assembly plants, and hospitals. Their examination showed that in these organizations union and management are establishing new career ladders and developing joint determination of policies concerning overtime, workbreak periods, leaves of absences, production standards, and new relationships between foremen and stew-

ards. These projects involve at least 7,380 workers. A report by Ted Mills reveals that there are at least two thousand work organizations engaged in job enrichment or work humanization projects. We may infer from the report that far more than 7,380 workers are involved in such projects.

In addition, innovations have been made at a number of non-union plants to encourage worker participation in decision making. The results have been warmly greeted by interested investigators. Other researchers are not as enthusiastic, but acknowledge that a few have been successful — mainly because they were accompanied by the following characteristics: a fit between worker and the job; work that is truly challenging, diversified, and carries responsibility for others; a genuine voice by workers in decision making; competent supervision; and, finally, sound labor-management relations, job security, and decent working conditions before changes are introduced. To find these characteristics in one plant or corporation is rare, and may explain why the team I worked with found few examples of successful job enrichment experiments.

In brief, a considerable number of researchers and union leaders believe many workers are dissatisfied with their jobs. A smaller group of academics believe that the typical worker is alienated, perhaps because of false consciousness or lack of sophistication and education. All agree that the influence of work pervades most of life's situations and shapes one's personality and concerns in and outside of the work setting. Some critics assert that unions are not sufficiently alert to the limitations of present arrangements of work and passively accept the status quo. All utilize the reputed stories of successful changes introduced in plants in Sweden and elsewhere to legitimate their concern for improvements in the quality of working life in America.

ATTITUDES OF MANAGEMENT

Probably the audience which has responded most readily to proposals for improving the quality of working life has been management, in the belief that a satisfied worker will be a more productive worker. Just as employers have been the most important policy makers to support the human relations movement, so they have been ardent supporters of programs to redesign jobs and to introduce reforms in the job structure. Harry Braverman, in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, points out that employers are more realistic than academic writers regarding quality-of-working-life problems and do not believe that ongoing antagonisms between management and labor can be solved with the introduction of a solution as simple as job enrichment. Braverman suggests that the problem for employers is one of cost and control, and not work humanization. They see their costs mounting and their control challenged as absenteeism and turnover increase and production decreases. The solution desired by employers is one which enhances their competitive position on the market.

Other writers point out that employers are using the concerns about the quality of working life to justify the importance of profits and to increase loyalty to the company. For instance, some employers are encouraging company profit-sharing plans, stock ownership plans, and the like to persuade workers that they have a voice in the determination of company policy — ostensibly a form of workers' participation. Employers believe that if the workers have some kind of investment in the company they will be more concerned about profits and therefore be more cooperative in implementing the policies of the company.

Too often, however, the changes they introduce are superficial, meager, and seen as manipulative by the worker. Many union leaders, as well as rank-and-file members, view job enrichment

or other changes in the work or wage structure introduced by employers as a "con job" or as a cosmetic touch. Taylorism, they say, hasn't died, it has simply taken another form.

Some of the difficulties managements and others have in redesigning jobs reside in limitations set by the product, the technology, the desire to maximize profits, and the need for the economies of mass production. Even when technology, product, and other factors permit job redesign and other reforms, the question still remains, as Bell put it in his well-known essay "Work and Its Discontents,"

Should work be organized so as to increase output and decrease costs and — assuming these benefits are passed on — so that there is a larger product for society? Or should work be organized so as to benefit the individuals on the job? Since relative costs are the variables around which our utilitarian calculi revolve, who shall bear the cost, the consumer or the worker?

Bell, writing in 1956, answers that it is the consumer who benefits. Is that answer still correct in 1977?

FACTORS SHAPING THE QUALITY

I would like now to examine briefly the factors which may influence the quality of working life. There are those who see technology — as in the case of assembly-line plants — as the chief villain responsible for the social impoverishment of many workers subject to its coercing rhythms. They stress fragmentation of job, specialization, Fordism, and Taylorism as the chief determinants adversely affecting the workers subject to their domination.

Another school of thought, whose spokesman is Blauner, proposes that the degree of alienation and freedom felt by workers is related to the technology, social organization, division of labor, and economic structure of various industries. For example, the work of the printer is carried on essentially by hand rather than

by complex technology. The character of his role in the division of labor allows him considerable discretion on the job, permits him to work on a great variety of jobs, and places him in a strategic position in the shop. He is relatively well-paid, his union is very strong, and the bureaucracy he deals with is small and traditional. This combination encourages a degree of individualism, dignity, and self-esteem which provides him with a feeling of high satisfaction and relative freedom on the job. On the other hand, the work of the auto assembler takes place within the framework of a finely specialized division of labor, a large and impersonal bureaucracy, and a technology which tends to make him an appendage to the machine — but for the presence of his union. The economic structure of the industry encourages a fairly uniform wage with little differentiation in wage spreads, leading to a deep cleavage between labor and management. As a whole, notes Blauner, the resultant structure tends to produce feelings of powerlessness, isolation, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement in the auto assembler. The distribution of the technology, division of labor, social organization, and economic structure is different in each industry and affects aspects of freedom or alienation in varying ways.

A third group of left-wing critics believes that private ownership or control of the means of production and management prerogatives effectively shape and limit the quality of life of workers. A fourth group of investigators associated with human relations schools contends that the attitudes and behavior of members of the management hierarchy help create conditions which deny to workers the feeling of self-worth, recognition, growth, and self-expression. Finally, there is a school of thought which believes alienation and dissatisfaction on the job are produced by factors such as market values; cultural patterns emphasizing material

success; profit-making; a cult devoted to narrow efficiency; and an instrumental attitude to one's job (i.e., a job is simply a tool for achieving one's goals outside the work place).

TECHNOLOGY AND THE QWL

Proposals for improving the quality of working life, as I have already suggested, take a variety of forms. Left-wing critics assert that it is not technology that is the villain, but rather it is private ownership in its ruthless pursuit of money which cheapens the quality of working life. They argue that unions must move more forcefully in the economic and political arenas to challenge and whittle down management prerogatives. More democracy in unions, more rights for stewards, more militancy, and more sharing of decision making with management are required, they suggest, if the lives of workers are to be significantly improved. Some left-wing critics are willing to go along with job redesign if changes are made in decision making which will permit labor a voice in determining how work standards are developed.

Some sociologists — Blauner for one — advocate a change in the basic values underlying businesses and technology so that tasks are adapted for the convenience of the worker instead of vice versa. Serrin, author of a recent study critical of the relationship between the UAW and GM, and others, would reduce the size of plants so that workers can get to know each other better, minimize the status gap between the various ranks in the work place, eliminate the ever-present double standard (e.g., posh dining facilities for executives; drab dining facilities for workers), increase job rotation, and develop joint consultation between labor and management to attack problems such as absenteeism, drugs, and turnover. Still others propose the following: fairer incentive plans that are tied into pay-for-performance, labor-

management committees, and massive changes in the social and technical systems determining how work is performed. Of course, this is apart from job redesign and job enrichment.

SOLUTIONS OF UNION LEADERS

I have not fully discussed the solutions proposed by some union leaders, or implied by the methods others use daily, to improve what they call "working conditions." A proper name for their strategy is "salami tactics." That is, unions work day by day, bit by bit, "slice by slice," to improve working conditions. They struggle to improve safety and health standards and to shore up the Occupational Safety and Health Act. They also try to raise the quality of lighting, ventilation, dining facilities, sanitation, and heat, and to lower the level of noise. Through the grievance procedure provided by the collective bargaining agreement, unions act on a wide variety of problems, and shape to some extent the quality of working life.

I have attempted to present a number of views on the question before us. What are my own preferences? I support the various methods followed by union leaders to improve working conditions. The latter term is really an old-fashioned phrase for the quality of working life. These methods are practical; they are based on the existing power relationship; they cut close to the texture of life in the work place; they grow out of the typical functions of unions; and they reflect the aspirations of the workers themselves. These methods are geared to whittling down management's power. They are small scale in the sense that they do not propose "utopian" solutions such as making vast changes in technology, changes which may be impossible to achieve for decades.

UNION PROPOSALS

Very few unions attempt to challenge so-called "management

prerogatives," the exercise of which acutely affects life on the job. The UAW is one of the few unions which reserves the right to strike during the life of a contract over work standards, an alternative which increases the ability of workers to shape their work life. In addition, there is a clause in UAW agreements with Ford, GM, and Chrysler, which provides for quality of working life committees. Such committees provide a legitimate launching pad for the introduction of job enrichment and other job reforms and it would be beneficial for workers generally if more unions would negotiate with their managements for their provision. It would also be useful to change the grievance procedure of most collective bargaining agreements so that workers will not be disciplined or discharged until they are proven guilty, a proposal which the United Steel Workers Union is demanding for its next contract. It would also be helpful to require companies to obtain agreements with unions on the speed or pace at which they plan to run the lines, to permit time-off during working hours to attend to pressing personal matters, to provide decent cafeterias and parking facilities, to prevent companies from having the unilateral right to transfer workers or to transfer work out of the plant or office, and to create satellite areas where workers can rest and relax during coffee breaks. In addition, the worker's need for security, health, and safety should be given equal — if not more — consideration with the management's need for efficiency, economy and profits. Many academics, not to mention members of management, ignore the need for these changes. Yet in the context of power relationships, these reforms — plus genuine job enrichment — may improve the quality of working life far more than the solutions of the various human relations schools which ignore the persistent conflict of interests between management and labor.

SUMMARY

I have attempted to summarize the intellectual struggle which has waged for some years now over the quality of working life, and over related practical steps and projects which have evolved. The discussion may be summarized very briefly by referring to the opinions of two eminent writers in the debate. One is Mitchell Fein, an industrial engineer and specialist in job productivity and incentive systems, to whom I have referred earlier, who concludes that there is little evidence that job enrichment works; the other is Michael Maccoby, a psychologist and behavioral scientist, who believes that as a result of job enrichment "workers have begun to experience the liberation of themselves, with a flowering of ideas and energy." And so the debate goes.

Clearly the issues are complex and not easily definable or solvable. The debate has produced a proliferation of literature, projects, hope, skepticism, and criticism. The debate and the demonstration projects will continue through all seasons, recession as well as prosperity. They reflect the persistent pressure in work places and in society generally for the improvement of the quality of life. It is much too early to come to any conclusion about the main drift of the debate and of the projects. The returns are not yet in by a long shot.

In concluding my remarks I would like to note that too many academic figures underestimate the ability of workers to cope with the complex problems they face in the workshop. The gains made by the workers and their unions should not be underestimated. The conditions of workers in plants or offices have measurably improved as a result of the efforts by union leaders and especially by workers. The latter have demonstrated considerable immunity from that kind of work which, if unchecked by their efforts and by their unions, could prove to be demeaning and dehumanizing.

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They have developed what Veblen calls "strategies of independence" and the discussants in the debate will have to take that into consideration.

Nevertheless, the task is Sisyphean and can only be met adequately by "more" — to use a word associated with Samuel Gompers — more autonomy for the worker by changing the work structure, more willingness on the part of some union leaders to view the problem with an open mind, more cooperation by management with unions to improve the quality of working life, and finally more efforts by union stewards to raise workers' consciousness about what they expect out of work life and life in general. It is sad that so many workers share the view of life expressed by a woman who lost a job she had held for many years. She got another job, and when asked by the *New York Times* reporter how it compared with her last job, replied:

You have to have something to eat and keep yourself clean and clothed. The extras, if they come, that's O.K.

I don't think it is "O.K." I think that she and others like her are entitled to a far greater share of society's goods, amenities, services, and respect than they are at present receiving. The movement for work humanization, with proper safeguards, is one real step in this direction.

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